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KILLER STREAK



LOOK!

THESE
TWO
TERRIFIC
ISSUES

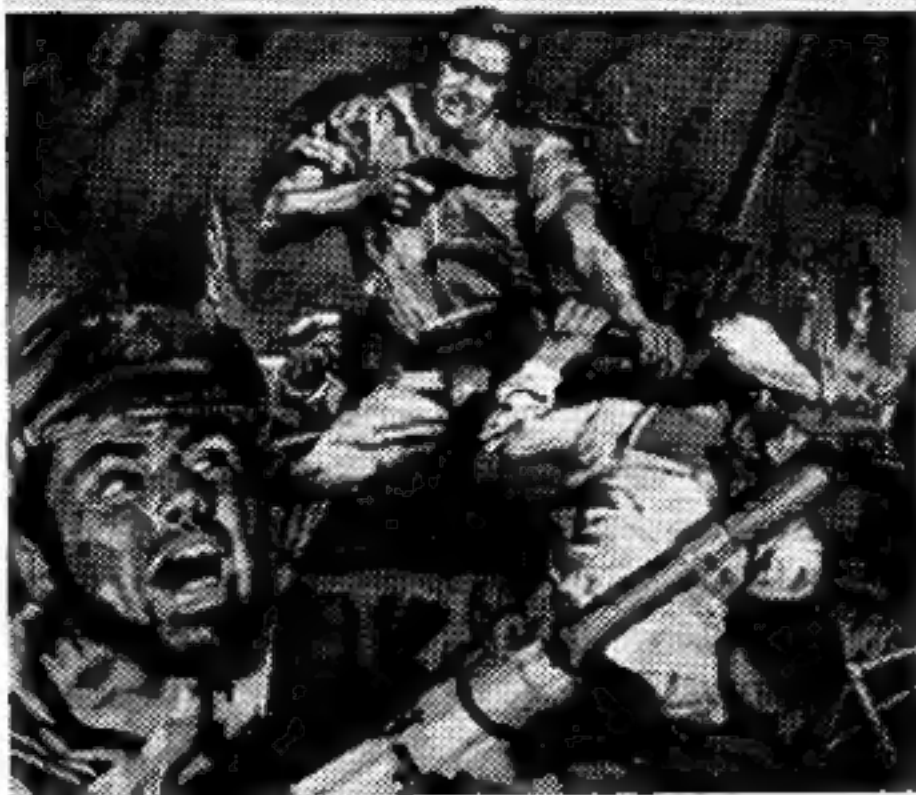
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Repel Boarders



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KILLER STREAK

HIS ENEMIES CALLED HIM THE 'BUTCHER'. MEN WHO FLEW BESIDE HIM SPOKE OF HIS TOUGHNESS AND HIS COURAGE, BUT NEVER OF HIS FRIENDSHIP, FOR THERE WAS SOMETHING COLD AND INHUMAN IN HIS PALE GREY EYES... BRANNIGAN HAD THE KILLER STREAK!



Chapter 1. Professional Killer

THE RECORDS SHOW THAT BRANNIGAN MADE HIS LAST KILL ONE LATE SPRING DAY IN 1944, HIGH ABOVE THE BATTLE-SCARRED MOUNTAINS OF NORTHERN ITALY.

BUT WHAT THE RECORDS COULD NEVER SHOW WAS THE COLD FEROCITY OF THE EXECUTION...

THE SMALL GERMAN SPOTTER PLANE WAS UNARMED AND HARMLESS. NOW THAT ITS PROTECTING FIGHTERS HAD BEEN ROUTED, IT WAS LIKE A MOTHERLESS LAMB, PATHETIC AND VULNERABLE...



LIKE A HUNGRY WOLF, BRANNIGAN'S SPITFIRE CLOSED ON THE DEFENCELESS SPOTTER PLANE. HIS CANNONS FLAMED. THE 'LAMB' DID NOT HAVE A CHANCE...

UNBLINKING, BRANNIGAN'S EYES NEVER LEFT THE SHATTERED SPOTTER PLANE AS IT PLUMMETED TO EARTH. THEN, WITH A FLICK OF HIS WINGS, HE DROPPED INTO FORMATION BESIDE HIS SILENT COMRADES.



THE BATTLE-HARDENED MEMBERS OF 802 SQUADRON NO LONGER LET BRANNIGAN'S RUTHLESSNESS DISTURB THEM. THEY SHOWED THEIR CONDEMNATION IN THEIR SILENCE...

Killer Streak

BUT THE EFFECT OF BRANNIGAN'S ACTION ON YOUNG TIM OWEN WAS SHARP AND DRASTIC. RAW FROM ADVANCED TRAINING SCHOOL, THIS HAD BEEN HIS BAPTISM IN WAR...



TIM OWEN HAD LONGED FOR THE DAY WHEN HE WOULD FIGHT BESIDE SUCH LEGENDARY FIGURES. BUT AS THE FLAMING PLANE SPIRALLED TO EARTH, SOMETHING DIED IN TIM OWEN.

JOHNNY MANSTON, THE SECTION LEADER, WAS ALREADY TALKING TO THE C.O. AS TIM OWEN WALKED, WHITE-FACED, TOWARDS HIS QUARTERS.

OWEN SAW HIS FIRST ACTION THIS MORNING, SIR... A FAULTLESS BRANNIGAN EXECUTION!

HE'LL GET OVER IT. WE ALL DID. THIS IS WAR, MANSTON, NOT A BOXING RING! BRANNIGAN SHOTS TO KILL! YOU CAN'T SACK A FIGHTING MAN FOR THAT!



IN THE MESS THAT NIGHT BRANNIGAN SAT ALONE, AS USUAL. HE WATCHED, AS TIM OWEN MOVED THROUGH THE THROG OF PILOTS.

I WONDER HOW YOU RATE YOUR IDOL NOW, MISTER HERO WORSHIPPING OWEN?



AS OWEN PASSED BEHIND HIS CHAIR, BRANNIGAN'S HAND SHOT OUT AND PULLED THE YOUNG PILOT TO A STANDSTILL.

STILL HANKERING FOR THAT COSY CHAT ON TACTICS, OWEN? OR HAVE YOU LOST YOUR APPETITE SINCE THIS MORNING?



OWEN FLUSHED WITH EMBARRASSMENT AND TURNED AWAY, BUT BRANNIGAN WAS NOT TO BE CHEATED OF HIS FUN SO EASILY...

WITH A JERK OF HIS FOREARM, BRANNIGAN SPUN THE YOUNG MAN ROUND AND PUSHED HIM INTO THE VACANT CHAIR.

YESTERDAY YOU WERE KEEN TO ASK QUESTIONS. TODAY YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW BRANNIGAN! WELL, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR THE ANSWERS!



Killer Streak

THE HARSH VOICE RASPED UNPLEASANTLY ACROSS THE SILENT ROOM.

I'M A **PROFESSIONAL** KILLER, OWEN! I WANT TO BE A LIVE PILOT, NOT A NAME ON A WAR MEMORIAL! THERE ARE FIVE MILLION NAZIS ITCHING TO GET ME IN THEIR SIGHTS. I AIM TO GET THEM IN MINE FIRST!

AS HE SPOKE, BRANNIGAN'S HUGE HAND CRASHED DOWN HARD ON THE TABLE. HE TURNED IT UPWARDS AND OWEN COULD SEE A FLY WRIGGLING BETWEEN BRANNIGAN'S FINGERS...

I LEAVE NOTHING TO CHANCE, OWEN. A DEAD PILOT DOESN'T FLY AGAIN. MY MOTTO: NO SECOND CHANCES!

THE FINGERS SQUEEZED TOGETHER ON THE TRAPPED FLY...

JOHNNY MANSTON DECIDED THAT BRANNIGAN HAD GONE FAR ENOUGH. THE BIG PILOT GLARED AS MANSTON WALKED UP...

ALL RIGHT, BRANNIGAN, LET'S END THE AMATEUR THEATRICALS FOR TONIGHT! LEAVE THE KID ALONE!

SHOVE OFF, MANSTON! POKE YOUR NOSE IN WHEN IT'S A MATTER OF DISCIPLINE!

MANSTON LET THE JIBE PASS. HE HAD NEVER BEEN ABLE TO FAULT BRANNIGAN IN HIS DUTIES. HE DID HIS JOB JUST THAT LITTLE BIT BETTER THAN HIS WAR-TIME COMRADES...

I NEVER DID FIT IN WITH YOUR IDEA OF AN OFFICER, DID I, MANSTON?

YOU RATE THE TOP SCORE IN THIS SQUADRON, BRANNIGAN. NO ONE BEGRUDGES YOU THAT!

ONLY THE TIMELY ENTRANCE OF THE C.O.
STOPPED THE ARGUMENT FROM
DEVELOPING INTO A BRAWL...

MANSTON!
BRANNIGAN!

THE AUTHORITATIVE
VOICE BROUGHT
BRANNIGAN BACK
TO HIS SENSES. HIS
FISTS UNCLENCHED
AND HE RELAXED...

THE C.O. GLANCED COOLLY
AROUND THE ROOM. THE
TENSION EASED...

CARRY ON,
GENTLEMEN. I'D
LIKE A WORD
WITH YOU,
BRANNIGAN...

THE C.O. WASTED NO TIME IN POLITE CONVERSATION. HE KNEW BRANNIGAN TOO WELL FOR THAT.

THIS IS OFF THE RECORD, BRANNIGAN. I DON'T CARE HOW ROUGH YOU PLAY IT WITH THE JERRIES! I PAY NO ATTENTION WHEN THE MAINTENANCE BODS COMPLAIN TO ME ABOUT YOUR CONTINUAL CRITICISM...



I DON'T CARE IF EVERY MAN IN THIS SQUADRON HATES YOU! BUT WHEN YOU LOWER THE MORALE OF EVEN ONE OF MY PILOTS, I WANT YOU OUT OF MY SQUADRON!



BRANNIGAN EYED THE C.O. IMPASSIVELY. THE THREAT WAS WASTED. BRANNIGAN FELT NO LOYALTY TO SQUADRON OR SERVICE.

BRANNIGAN HAD JOINED THE A R FORCE BECAUSE IT OFFERED HIM FOOD AND A BED, WHEN MILLIONS LIKE HIM WALKED THE STREETS, HUNGRY. HE HAD SLOGGED THE TOUGH ROAD TO PROMOTION, AND IN 1939 HE HAD GOT HIS COMMISS ON. BUT THE LONG, HARD YEARS HAD MADE HIM A LONE WOLF.

LOOKS AS IF SOMEONE'S HAD A ROCKET! WONDER IF IT WAS BRANNIGAN, OR THE C.O.!



THERE WAS AN EARLY SCRAMBLE CALL FOR 802 SQUADRON NEXT MORNING. A STRONG FORCE OF GERMAN AIRCRAFT HAD BEEN SPOTTED...

ATTENTION /
ALL SECTIONS
SCRAMBLE!

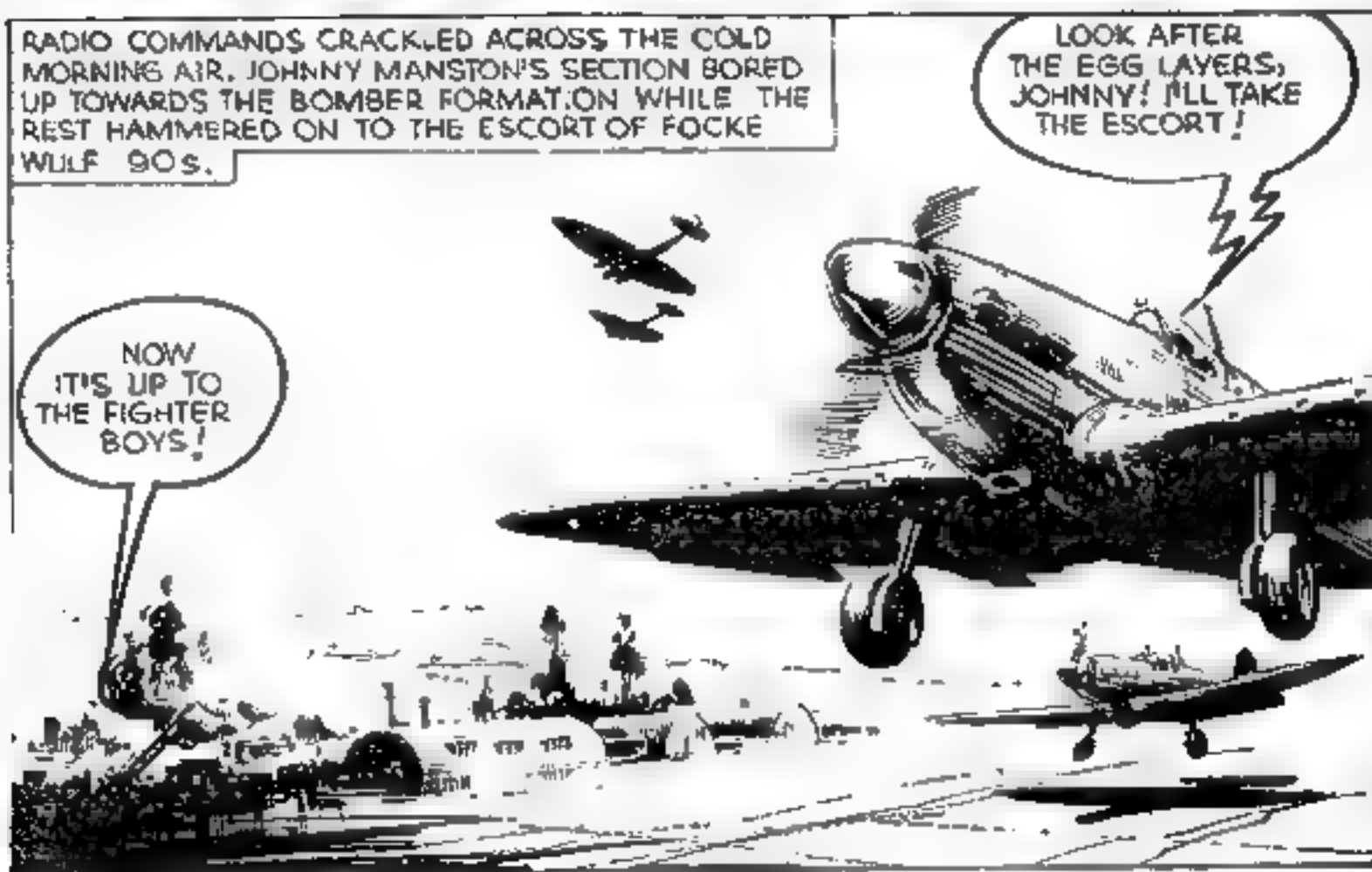
LOOKS
LIKE JUNKERS
EIGHTY-EIGHTS
UP THERE!



RADIO COMMANDS CRACKLED ACROSS THE COLD MORNING AIR. JOHNNY MANSTON'S SECTION BORED UP TOWARDS THE BOMBER FORMATION WHILE THE REST HAMMERED ON TO THE ESCORT OF FOCKE WULF 90S.

LOOK AFTER
THE EGG LAYERS,
JOHNNY! I'LL TAKE
THE ESCORT!

NOW
IT'S UP TO
THE FIGHTER
BOYS!



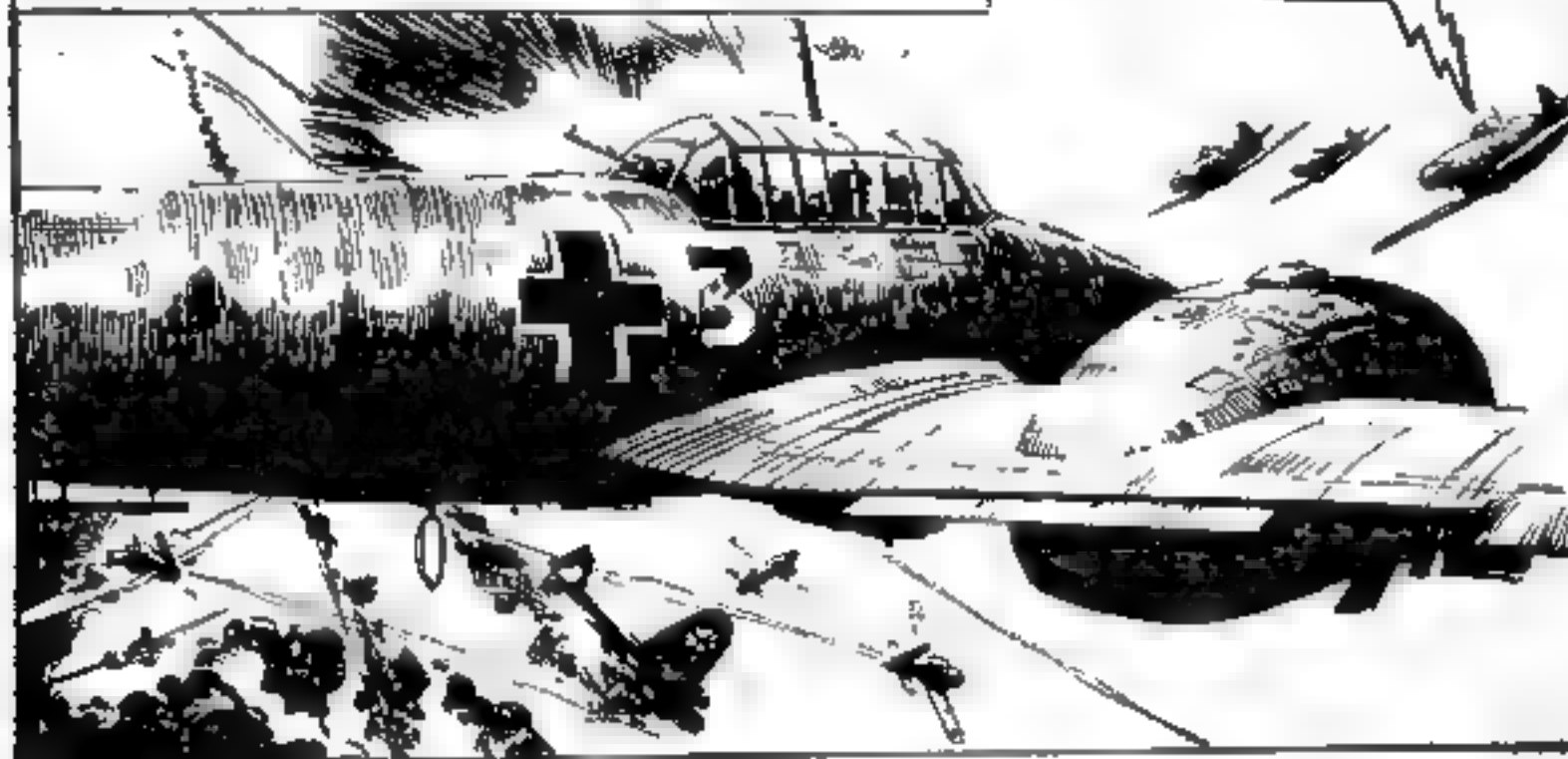
THE EAGER SPITFIRE PILOTS FOLLOWED MANSTON IN LIKE A PACK OF TERRIERS. THE SKY WAS SUDDENLY ABLAZE WITH TRACER BULLETS.



ACHTUNG!
SPITFIRES! WE
ARE HIT!

AS THE SPITFIRES SLASHED THROUGH THE BOMBER RANKS FOR THE THIRD TIME, THE GERMANS FINALLY CRACKED. WITH BOMB BAYS THROWN OPEN IN PANIC THEY SCATTERED ACROSS THE SKY. MANSTON'S VOICE RANG OUT IN EVERY SPITFIRE PILOT'S HEADPHONES.

LEAVE 'EM,
CHAPS! TWO DOWN
AND THE REST ARE
HARMLESS. WATCH
FOR THE FIGHTERS!



BRANNIGAN JOCKEYED FOR POSITION OUTSIDE THE MILLING PLANES. SLOWLY THE GERMAN FIGHTERS WERE FORCED BACK TOWARDS THE MOUNTAINS. SOON THEY WOULD CRACK, AND HE WOULD HUNT THEM MERCILESSLY AS THEY FLED FOR SAFETY...

CLIMB, OWEN!
CLIMB!

BRANNIGAN ROARED HIS ADVICE ACROSS THE RADIO BUT OWEN HAD PANICKED AS HE SAW THE NAZI PLANE CLINGING VICIOUSLY TO HIS TAIL.

THE GERMAN'S CANOPY SHATTERED IN BRANNIGAN'S FIRST BURST, BUT THE NAZI PILOT BANKED HIS AIRCRAFT AND SCREAMED AWAY TO THE NORTH.

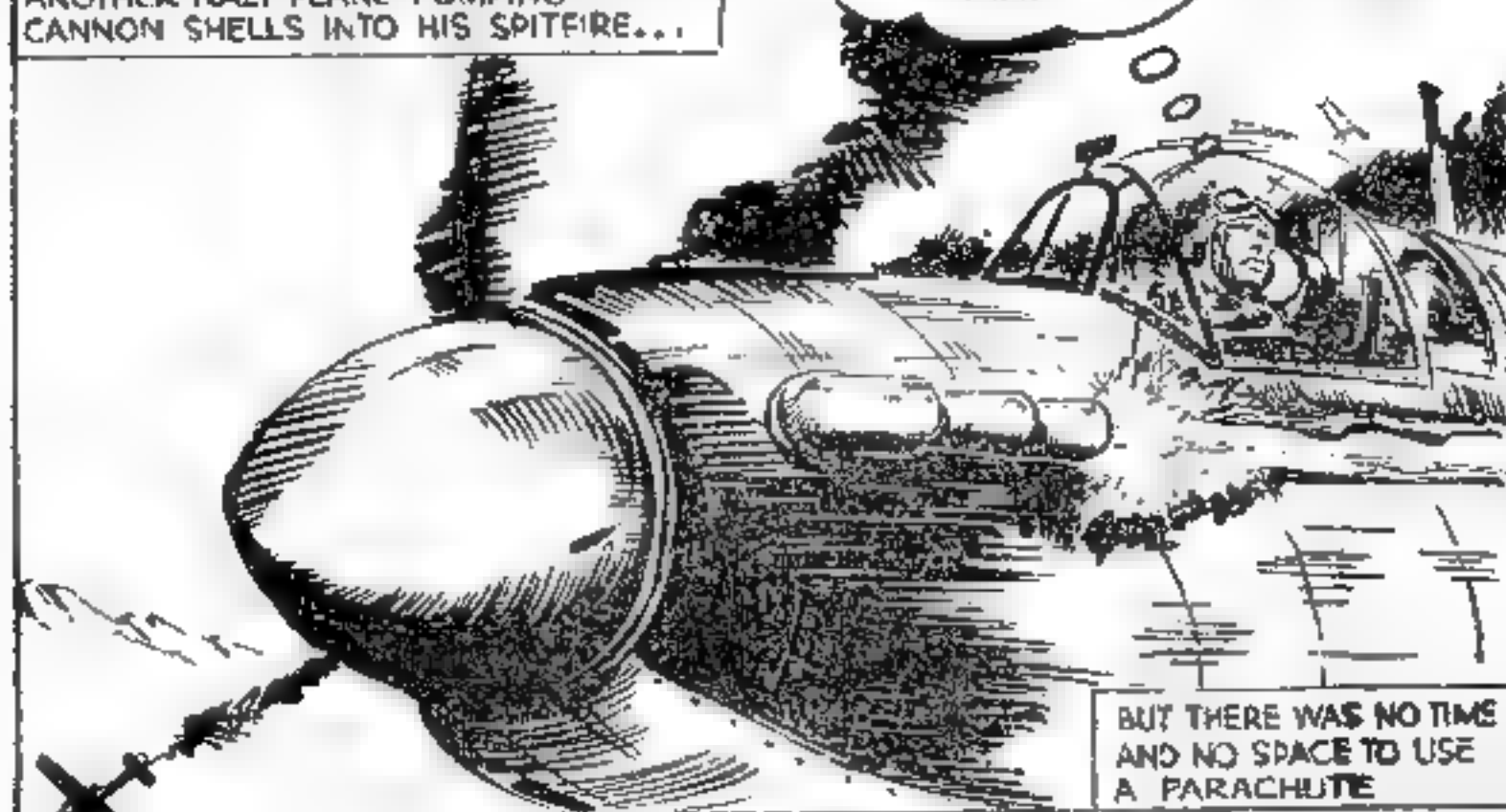
YOU
IDIOT, OWEN!
NEVER
TURN YOUR
BACK ON A
RAT!

BRANNIGAN FOLLOWED THE GERMAN FIGHTER. HE PRESSED HIS GUN-BUTTON FOR THE SECOND TIME. BUT HIS SHELLS ONLY CUT A GROOVE ALONG THE TOP OF THE ENEMY'S FUSELAGE.



BUT AS BRANNIGAN WENT TO FIRE HIS THIRD BURST AT THE GERMAN FIGHTER, THE WORLD AROUND HIM EXPLODED. IN HIS COCKPIT MIRROR BRANNIGAN SAW ANOTHER NAZI PLANE PUMPING CANNON SHELLS INTO HIS SPITFIRE...

HE JUMPED ME! THIS'LL BE A LAUGH FOR MANSTON! GOT TO GET OUT ... AWAY —



BUT THERE WAS NO TIME AND NO SPACE TO USE A PARACHUTE

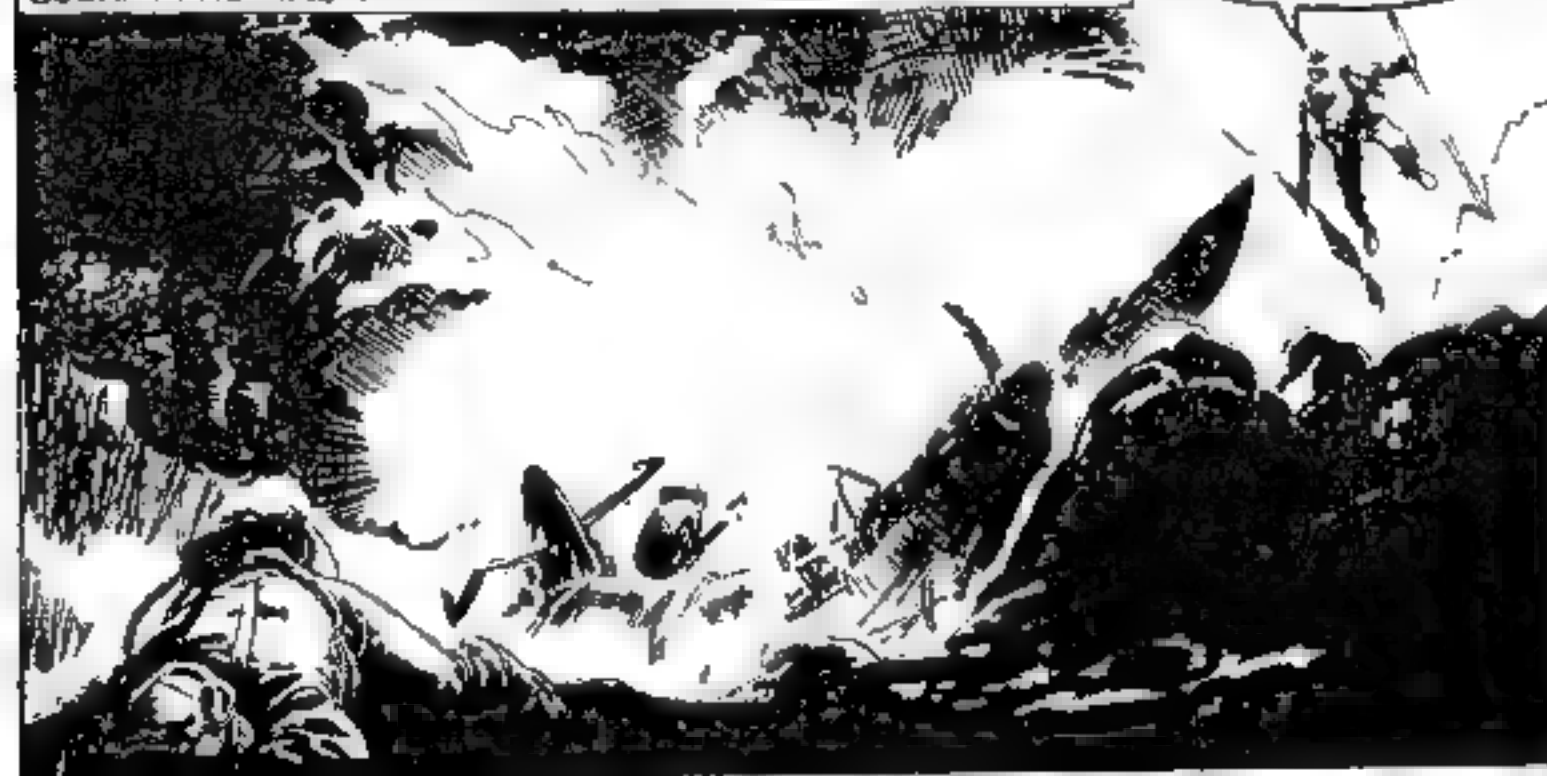
Killer Streak

HIS FINGERS STRUGGLED WITH THE CONTROL COLUMN, BUT THERE WAS NO RESPONSE FROM THE PLANE. WITH A JARRING CRASH, THE PORT WING-TIP RAMMED INTO AN OUTCROP OF ROCK. THE SPITFIRE BOUNCED TWICE AND THUNDERED DOWN THE PRECIPICE OF SCREE, TO CRUMPLE UP FIVE HUNDRED FEET BELOW...



LIKE A FERY ROCKET THE PLANE BLRST AGAINST A HUGE ROCK. BUT ITS LONG GRIND DOWN THE LOOSE SHALE HAD SLOWED ITS IMPETUS. BRANNIGAN'S LIMP BODY WAS THROWN FROM THE COCKPIT AND FELL AT THE EDGE OF THE BURNING DEBRIS.

MAMA MIA! HE
WILL BURN! I COME,
INGLES!...
I COME!



Chapter 2. *Snatched from Death*

THE WORLD HISSED AND ROARED ABOUT HIM. A DULL ACHING PAIN THROBBED IN HIS FOREHEAD. SOMEONE WAS GRASPING HIS ARM AND TUGGING AT HIM. AS BRANNIGAN BEGAN DIMLY TO RECOVER CONSCIOUSNESS...



INCH BY INCH THE STRANGE PAIR STAGGERED AWAY FROM THE RING OF FIRE. WITH A LAST DESPERATE HEAVE, THE SHEPHERD BOY HELPED BRANNIGAN TO SAFETY...



THE BURNING WRECKAGE HAD DIED TO A SMOULDERING HEAP WHEN BRANNIGAN FINALLY CAME TO HIS SENSES. HIS BLURRED VISION SLOWLY FOCUSED ON THE SCENE.

AN EYTIE KID! HE HASN'T CALLED THE S.S. YET, SO THERE'S STILL A CHANCE TO GET OUT OF THIS MESS...

SPLINTERS FROM THE NAZI CANNON SHELLS HAD WOUNDED HIM IN THE TEMPLE, AND HIS RIGHT LEG WAS BADLY BURNED. HE WAS IN BAD SHAPE FOR THE LONG WALK HOME...

BRANNIGAN SPOKE LITTLE ITALIAN, AND PAOLO, THE SHEPHERD BOY, KNEW LITTLE ENGLISH. BUT THEY STRUGGLED TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.

OKAY! PAOLO, YOU GO... PRESTO... BRING HELP... SI?

SI' MISTER BRANNIGAN. MY FATHER, AND MY UNCLE VASCARI THEY COME! MY UNCLE TALK PLENTY ENGLISH!

BRANNIGAN WATCHED THE BOY AS HE CLIMBED OUT OF SIGHT OVER THE RIDGE. HE REACHED INSIDE HIS FLYING JACKET AND PULLED OUT A SMALL AUTOMATIC.

THE KID SEEMED GENUINE, BUT IT MAY BE A DIFFERENT STORY WHEN THE S.S. START ASKING QUESTIONS...

THE HARD STOCK OF THE GUN FELT GOOD IN HIS HAND. HE DID NOT TRUST MEN. BUT HE KNEW WHAT A GUN COULD DO...

THE SOUND OF HOBNAIL BOOTS RASPING ON THE ROCKS WOKE BRANNIGAN. WITH AN EFFORT, HE RAISED HIMSELF ON ONE ARM AND SAW THREE FIGURES COMING TOWARDS HIM.



BRANNIGAN HAD LAIN IN THE SUN FOR FIVE HOURS. HE WAS PARCHED AND THE COOL WATER PAOLO'S FATHER HELD TO HIS LIPS TASTED GOOD.



THE THREAT WAS OBVIOUS BEHIND THE STRONG AMERICAN ACCENT. VASCARI HAD BROUGHT MORE THAN THE LANGUAGE BACK WITH HIM FROM THE CHICAGO SLUMS.

Killer Streak

AS PAOLO AND HIS FATHER PREPARED THE STRETCHER, BRANNIGAN WATCHED THROUGH HALF-CLOSED EYES AND PONDERED THIS NEW MENACE.



VASCARI'S
A WIDE BOY!
HE'LL SELL ME
OUT TO THE
GESTAPO IF HE
GETS HALF
A CHANCE.

BRANNIGAN WAS SECURELY STRAPPED TO THE STRETCHER, VASCARI LOUNGED OVER TO HIM. THE TIME HAD COME TO TALK BUSINESS!



YOU'LL
GET YOUR BLOOD
MONEY, VASCARI!

THE S.S. ARE NOT
SQUEAMISH WHEN THEY
CATCH PEOPLE HELPING
THEIR ENEMIES. WE RISK
A LOT, MISTER...

BRANNIGAN GRINNED CYNICALLY...

VASCARI'S THIN HAND SLID SWIFTLY BENEATH THE INJURED MAN'S JACKET. BRANNIGAN MOVED FASTER. THE AUTOMATIC SLAMMED DOWN, AND, WITH A SNARL OF PAIN, THE ITALIAN DROPPED THE WALLET.

AAAARGH!

PAYMENT ON DELIVERY, YOU RAT! YOUR NEXT MISTAKE WILL BE YOUR LAST ONE, VASCARI!

SWEAT BEADS OF PAIN STOOD OUT ON HIS FOREHEAD, BUT BRANNIGAN FELT THE EXULTATION OF A HARD MAN FIGHTING HIS WAY OUT.

THE AUTOMATIC STILL TRAINED ON VASCARI, BRANNIGAN WATCHED LEONARDO. IF THE BIG MAN SIDED WITH HIS BROTHER THERE WOULD BE TWO DEAD MEN ON THE MOUNTAIN.

LEONARDO TURNED AND COLDLY MOTIONED VASCARI TO TAKE UP THE FRONT OF THE STRETCHER.

BRANNIGAN LAY BACK, TREMBLING WITH WEAKNESS. FOR THE MOMENT THINGS WERE GOING HIS WAY.

MY FATHER
SAY IT IS OKAY,
MISTER
BRANNIGAN!

PAOLO POINTED TO SOME CRUMBLING
RUINS HIGH ABOVE THEM.

THE YOUNG BOY RAN AHEAD OF THE
OTHERS UP TO THE RUINS OF THE
FOSSINO MONASTERY AND SAT
WATCHFULLY WITH HIS FATHER'S
GUN ACROSS HIS KNEES.

HE IS
A TOUGH ONE,
THIS ENGLISH
FLYER! BUT HE WILL
BE LUCKY TO
SURVIVE UNTIL
WE ARE HOME.

PAOLO'S CRY RANG OUT SO SUDDENLY THAT VASCARI DROPPED HIS BURDEN WHEN IT WAS STILL SIX INCHES FROM THE GROUND.

WELL, WISE GUY, HOW DO YOU RECKON YOUR CHANCES NOW?

THE NAZIS, FATHER! THREE OF THEM, LEAVING THEIR TRUCK!



THE NAZI PATROL WERE HEADING TOWARDS THE RUINED BUILDING. VASCARI WATCHED THEM FEARFULLY.

I'VE GOT A FIFTY-FIFTY CHANCE BETWEEN A QUICK BULLET OR A PRISON CAMP, VASCARI! BUT IF THE NAZIS CATCH YOU, A CIVILIAN, HELPING AN ALLIED FLYER TO ESCAPE, YOU'LL BE IN TROUBLE!



THE INJURED FLYER GRINNED AS THE COLOUR DRAINED FROM THE ITALIAN'S FACE. THE BOY FLASHED A LOOK OF FEAR AT HIS FATHER—AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS, BRANNIGAN FELT A STAB OF REMORSE...

BRANNIGAN FELT SICK AS HE THOUGHT OF THE BOY BEING CAPTURED BY THE NAZIS.

THE
ENGLISHMAN
IS RIGHT, WE ARE
ALL IN THIS NOW!
IT'S THE BOCHE
OR JS!

WHY
DID I GET
MYSELF
INVOLVED IN
THIS?



IT WOULD BE TWO GUNS AGAINST THREE! BRANNIGAN KNEW HE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE A CHANCE ON VASCARI.

YOU'LL BE NEEDING THIS,
VASCARI!

GOOD! TAKE
IT, VASCARI, WE
SHALL AMBUSH
THEM AS THEY
COME THROUGH
THE GATEWAY!



THE S.S. CORPORAL MOTIONED HIS PATROL LOW AS THEY BREASTED THE LAST RISE BEFORE THE RUINED MONASTERY.

THE
ENGLANDER PILOT
MUST BE IN THERE, THEY
COULD NOT HAVE GOT
OVER THE RIDGE
WITHOUT US SEEING
THEM.



FOR ONE LONG HOUR THE GAME OF PATIENCE WENT ON. THEN GERMAN ARROGANCE AND IMPATIENCE ASSERTED ITSELF.

WHEN THE DARKNESS COMES, THEY WILL ESCAPE US. WE MUST DIG THEM OUT OF THERE NOW!



THE NAZIS ADVANCED TOWARDS THE GATEWAY. SOME YARDS OUT OF PISTOL RANGE, THEY BECAME SUSPICIOUS, AND SETTLED DOWN TO WAIT AND WATCH AGAIN.

WAIT, VASCARI! WE MUST BE SURE OF EVERY SHOT!

THEN SEND THE BOY TO TEMPT THEM NEARER! THEY MIGHT BE WAITING FOR REINFORCEMENTS...



AT AN AGE WHEN MOST BOYS ARE HAPPY AT THEIR GAMES, PAOLO HAD DONE A MAN'S JOB ON THE BLEAK MOUNTAINS.

MOVE QUICKLY AND NO HARM WILL COME. GO ALONG BEHIND THE WINDOW ARCHES. SHOW YOURSELF FOR ONE SECOND. THEN YOU MUST LIE STILL AND LEAVE THE REST TO US!



THE SOUND OF CLATTERING STONES CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF THE NAZIS.

TO YOUR LEFT, CORPORAL! THEY'RE CLEARING OUT!



THE NAZI CORPORAL MADE HIS
DECISION. IT WAS TO BE THE
LAST ONE HE EVER MADE...

QUICK!
THROUGH THE
GATEWAY, THERE
IS COVER
THERE!

NOW,
VASCARI!

THE ANCIENT RIFLE AND THE
MODERN AUTOMATIC CRACKED
TOGETHER IN HARMONY.

AN AMBUSH!

BUT THE SURVIVING NAZI WAS TOUGH,
AND QUICK TO REACT...

HIS SCHMEISSER BLASTED
THE AUTOMATIC FROM
VASCARI'S HAND...

GET HIM,
LEONARDO!



FLINGING HIMSELF TO
THE GROUND, THE
CLUMSY FARMER
HEAVED AT THE
GERMAN'S ANKLES.
THE GUN BLAZED
AIMLESSLY AT THE SKY.
VASCARI SNATCHED UP
BRANNIGAN'S FALLEN
PISTOL AND FIRED
AT THE FALLING NAZI...

UGH!



WITH A MANIACAL FRENZY, VASCARI FIRED AGAIN AND AGAIN AT THE DEAD MAN UNTIL LEONARDO THRUST HIM ASIDE CONTEMPTUOUSLY.

YOU ARE A FOOL, LEONARDO! WOULD THAT NAZI SHOW YOU ANY PITY? LET BUT ONE OF THEM LIVE AND YOU'LL BE A CANDIDATE FOR THEIR TORTURE-CHAMBERS.



VASCARI'S FINGERS DEFTLY STRIPPED THE DEAD NAZIS OF ALL THEIR VALIABLES, THEN THE TWO MEN AND THE BOY PILED ROCKS OVER THE BODIES.



A NEAT JOB, LEONARDO, ANY PROWLING GERMAN WILL THINK IT IS JUST ANOTHER FALL OF STONE!

THE STRAIN AND EXCITEMENT HAD FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH BRANNIGAN. TOUGH AS HE WAS, HE HAD REACHED THE LIMIT.

HE IS UNCONSCIOUS, BUT HE IS STILL BREATHING A LITTLE, FATHER!

HE NEEDS PROPER ATTENTION, QUICKLY!

IN THE LAST HOUR OF SUNLIGHT, THEY REACHED THE CREST OF THE MOUNTAIN AND STARTED THEIR DOWNWARD JOURNEY.

GO AHEAD, PAOLO. BUT DO NOT FORGET THE SIGNAL! THE DOCTOR WILL NOT COME IF IT IS NOT RIGHT!

BRANNIGAN KNEW LITTLE OF WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE NEXT FEW HOURS. VAGUELY, THROUGH A MIST OF PAIN, HE SAW PEOPLE ABOUT HIM AS HIS WOUNDS WERE DRESSED...



Chapter 3. Treachery!

DR. MANZETTI WAS AN OLD MAN WHO HAD SEEN MANY PATIENTS, BUT EVEN HE WAS SURPRISED AT BRANNIGAN'S QUICK RECOVERY IN THE FOLLOWING DAYS.

WE HAVE A TOUGH ONE HERE! A WEEK AGO HE IS NEARLY DEAD. NOW HE WANTS TO GET BACK TO THE WAR...

THERE'S A LOT TO BE DONE, DOC!



THE NEWS THE DOCTOR HAD BROUGHT FROM THE DISTANT TOWN DID NOT HELP TO CHEER UP THE RESTLESS PATIENT...



A NEW PANZER DIVISION HAS COME FROM THE NORTH, SIGNORE. ALREADY IT HAS DENTED THE ADVANCE OF THE AMERICANS!

BRANNIGAN SPENT THE NEXT FEW DAYS HOBBLING AROUND THE FARM. HE WAS CONSCIOUS OF BEING A BURDEN TO THE FRIENDLY ITALIANS WHEN FOOD WAS SCARCE, AND THE THREAT OF THE NAZIS HUNG OVER THEM.

HE IS GETTING ON WELL. WHAT DO YOU THINK, UNCLE VASCARI?

THERE ARE TOO MANY MOUTHS OPENING AROUND HERE... ESPECIALLY AT FEEDING TIME!



HATRED SHONE FROM VASCARI'S EYES. WHILE THE ENGLISHMAN WAS AMONG THEM, VASCARI WAS POWERLESS TO HURT HIM, FOR THE VENGEANCE OF THE GESTAPO WOULD FALL ON VASCARI, TOO...

YOU WILL BE PAID FOR THE HELP YOU HAVE GIVEN ME, VASCARI.



THE WORD OF AN ENGLISH GENTLEMAN, EH? YOU MAKE ME SICK!

BRANNIGAN GRABBED
THE ITALIAN...

ONE
MORE CRACK
LIKE THAT AND
I'LL BELT YOU,
VASCARI!



WITH A SNARL, THE TREACHEROUS
ITALIAN SPRANG AT BRANNIGAN.
HIS ARM SWUNG VICIOUSLY
THROUGH THE A R...

MY
AUTOMATIC!...
IT'S GONE!
WHERE THE
HECK...?

THIS TIME
I WILL KILL
YOU, WISE
GUY!



BRANNIGAN HAD STRETCHED HIS LUCK TOO FAR.
HIS INJURED LEG REFUSED THE WEIGHT OF HIS
TURN. HE STAGGERED OFF BALANCE...VASCARI'S
EYES GLINTED IN TRIUMPH.

NO! NO,
UNCLE!



FOR A MOMENT VASCARI'S RAGE WAS SWITCHED TO THE BOY.



SUDDENLY LEONARDO'S VOICE BOOMED OUT FROM THE DOORWAY OF THE HOUSE.

THAT
IS ENOUGH,
VASCARI! THERE
WILL BE NO
VIOLENCE HERE
IN MY HOME!



SCOWLING, VASCARI BROKE AWAY. HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN AFRAID OF LEONARDO. SILENTLY, PAOLO HANDED SOMETHING TO BRANNIGAN...



BRANNIGAN FOUND HIMSELF SMILING FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS...



BUT OLD HABITS ARE NOT EASILY BROKEN. HIS USUAL CYNICAL SCEPTICISM HAD TAKEN THE UPPER HAND AS HE WALKED AWAY...



FOR A LONG IMPATIENT WEEK HE HAD LISTENED TO THE TEMPO OF WAR RISING SHARPLY. ON THE EIGHTH DAY, FROM A VANTAGE POINT HIGH ABOVE THE FARM, BRANNIGAN DECIDED THAT THE TIME HAD COME FOR HIM TO TRY A BREAKTHROUGH.

...NO
USE HANGING ON
HERE HOPING THAT
OUR LOT SHOW UP
BEFORE THE S.S. !
I RECKON THE LEG
WILL STAND THE
PACE !

LEONARDO TRIED TO CHANGE THE PILOT'S MIND, BUT BRANNIGAN WOULD NOT LISTEN. . .

I THINK YOU ARE STILL
TOO WEAK, SIGNORE, BUT IF
YOU FEEL YOU MUST GO, PAOLO
WILL LEAD YOU TO THE
HIGH FOSSINO
RIDGE.

I THINK
I CAN MAKE
IT !

THEY SAT LATE THAT NIGHT DISCUSSING PLANS FOR THE ESCAPE, BUT UNKNOWN TO THEM, AN EAVESDROPPER WAS OUTSIDE THE WINDOW.

SLEEP WELL, SIGNORE, YOU WILL NEED YOUR STRENGTH IN THE DAYS TO COME! GOOD LUCK!

IT IS NOT LUCK YOU WILL BE NEEDING, ENGLISH FOOL, IT IS A MIRACLE!

BRANNIGAN AND THE BOY ROSE EARLY NEXT DAY. THEY PACKED FOOD AND CLOTHING FOR THE JOURNEY. MILES AWAY, A SIMILAR JOURNEY WAS BEING PREPARED...

YOUR INFORMANT IS RELIABLE, LEUTNANT?

YES, SIR. HE WILL LEAD US TO THIS ESCAPING ALLIED AIRMAN.

SINCE YOU ARE SO CONFIDENT, LEUTNANT, YOU SHALL HAVE THE HONOUR OF SNARING THIS PRISONER! I HOPE YOUR INFORMATION IS CORRECT...

FOR THE PAST HOUR BRANNIGAN HAD FORCED EVERY AGONISED MUSCLE BEYOND ITS LIMIT IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP PACE WITH THE LITHE PAOLO. BUT THREE HOURS OF STEADY CLIMBING HAD TAKEN THEIR TOLL OF HIS SICK BODY.

A...GOOD PLACE... HERE FOR A...BREATHER, PAOLO...



PAOLO HASTENED TO PREPARE FOOD FOR THEM. WITH REST AND FOOD, THE STRENGTH STARTED TO FLOW BACK INTO BRANNIGAN'S FRAME, AND THEY CLIMBED ON...

IT IS FORTUNATE THERE IS A HEAT-HAZE COVERING THE VALLEY ROAD, PAOLO. IT WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO SPOT US HERE!

BUT IT IS CLEAR FOR MILES! HIS HEAD WOUND MUST BE MAKING H.M. DIZZY!



THEIR CAMP THAT NIGHT WAS A CRUDE SHELTER UNDER THE LEE OF A CLIFF. IT HAD BEEN BUILT AND STOCKED WITH DRY WOOD BY THE PEOPLE OF THE MOUNTAINS, WHO KNEW WELL HOW SWIFTLY DANGER COULD STRIKE AT THOSE WHO TRAVELLED THE BLEAK RANGES,

THE FIRE CANNOT BE SEEN FROM BELOW, SIGNORE. ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS THESE MOUNTAINS WELL WOULD SPOT IT!


BUT AN HOUR'S CLIMB AWAY, A GERMAN PATROL RESTED. TALKING TO THE OFFICER WHO LED THEM WAS VASCARI!

YOU KNOW THIS TERRAIN. SEE IF YOU CAN TRACK THIS ENGLANDER. IT WILL SAVE OUR TIME AND ENERGY.

SII
HERR LEUTNANT!
I WILL RETURN ONLY BY THIS PATH. IF SOMEONE COMES ALONG ANY OTHER PATH—SHOOT!



THE ITALIAN KNEW WHERE TO GO, AND MOVED SWIFTLY AND SILENTLY TO HIS DESTINATION. HE WATCHED AS BRANNIGAN AND THE BOY RELAXED BY THEIR FIRE.



SO YOU WEAR CIVILIAN CLOTHES, FOOL! YOU WILL FACE THE F R I N G S Q U A D THAT AWAITS ALL SPIES!

THE MAN IN THE SHADOWS HAD HALF-TURNED TO SLIP AWAY WHEN THE CLINK OF COINS FALLING ON THE HARD GROUND DREW HIM BACK.

PAOLO HAD DROPPED HIS HANDKERCH EF IN WHICH HIS MONEY WAS TIED UP. WITH BRANNIGAN'S HELP, THE COINS WERE COLLECTED UP AGAIN...



YOUR SAVINGS, PAOLO?



SI, SI! MISTER BRANNIGAN! IT IS FOR MY FATHER'S KNIFE!

THE BOY'S FACE BEAMED WITH PLEASURE AS HE REVEALED HIS CLOSELY KEPT SECRET TO THE ENGLISHMAN HE TRUSTED.

IT IS A WONDERFUL KNIFE THAT WE HAVE SEEN IN THE TOWN! I HAVE WORKED AND SAVED SO THAT MY FATHER CAN HAVE SUCH A FINE PRESENT ON HIS BIRTHDAY!



THE KNIFE CAME TO LIFE IN BRANNIGAN'S IMAGINATION AS THE BOY VIVIDLY DESCRIBED IT, LYING IN A SHOW CASE, BLADES GLINTING AS THE LIGHT CAUGHT THE POLISHED STAINLESS STEEL.



BRANNIGAN SILENTLY WATCHED PAOLO PUT THE MONEY SAFELY AWAY. THE YEARS HAD DIMMED WHAT LITTLE HE REMEMBERED OF HIS OWN DREARY, UNHAPPY BOYHOOD. BUT, ON IMPULSE, HE GAVE PAOLO SOME MONEY.

THIS \$
FOR ME,
SIGNORE?

YES! BUY
ONE KNIFE FOR
YOURSELF AND ONE
FOR YOUR FATHER. DON'T
SPEND IT ON ANYTHING
ELSE... THERE WILL BE
AMPLE PAYMENT FOR
HELPING ME TO
GET AWAY!



BRANNIGAN TURNED AWAY, EMBARRASSED AT THE UNFAMILIAR SENTIMENT WHICH HAD PROMPTED THE GENEROUS ACT ON...

IN SPITE OF THE KEEN NIGHT AIR, BRANNIGAN WAS SOON ASLEEP. BUT PAOLO, CLUTCHING THE MONEY TIGHTLY, WAS TOO EXCITED. OUTSIDE, VASCARI WAITED PATIENTLY UNTIL HE THOUGHT THEY WERE BOTH ASLEEP...

I WILL
TAKE THAT
MONEY BEFORE
THE GERMANS
GET THEIR HANDS
ON IT...



THE BOY WOKE SUDDENLY, AND
GASPED IN SURPRISE...

UNCLE VASCARI!

NOT SO
LOUD! ONE
SOUND AND YOUR
ENGLISHMAN WILL
DIE! BE QUICK NOW,
WHERE IS THE
MONEY?

THE BOY STARED BACK DEFIANTLY...

VASCARI DRAGGED THE BOY UPRIGHT
AND SWUNG THE RIFLE THREATENINGLY
TOWARDS THE SLEEPING BRANNIGAN...

DO YOU
HEAR ME? THE
MONEY...!

IF I GIVE
YOU THE MONEY...
YOU WILL NOT
HARM HIM?

FOR A SPLIT SECOND VASCARI'S EYES FLICKERED FROM THE PRONE FIGURE TO REACH FOR THE NOTES IN PAOLO'S HAND. IN THAT MOMENT, BRANNIGAN LEAPT FORWARD...

THIS
IS THE LAST
ROUND, VASCARI!
IT'S YOU OR
ME!




BEFORE VASCARI COULD RECOVER, BRANNIGAN DIVED FOR THE GUN.

VASCARI KNEW THE GAME WAS UP... WITH A SHOUT OF DEFIANCE, HE FLED INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE MOUNTAINSIDE.



THE RIFLE BULLET SINGED THROUGH VASCARI'S SLEEVE AS HE RAN. PETRIFIED, HE PLUNGED RECKLESSLY ON TOWARDS HIS RENDEZVOUS WITH THE NAZI PATROL...

I'LL BE
BACK, WISE GUY!
I'LL BE BACK!

A black and white comic panel showing a man in a dark uniform running down a steep, rocky cliff. He is leaning forward, and his arms are outstretched. A speech bubble above him contains the text "I'LL BE BACK, WISE GUY! I'LL BE BACK!". The background shows a dark, jagged rock formation.

VASCARI RAGED ALOUD AS HE SLITHERED AND CLATTERED HIS WAY BACK. BUT HIS LAUGH ECHOED HYSTERICALLY AS HE PICTURED THE ENGLISHMAN CORNERED BY THE NAZIS.

THERE IS
SOMEONE UP THERE!

A black and white comic panel showing two soldiers in a trench. The soldier in the foreground is wearing a helmet and a uniform with a belt, and is looking up. The soldier behind him is also looking up. A speech bubble above them contains the text "THERE IS SOMEONE UP THERE!".

IT CANNOT
BE THE ITALIAN,
LEUTNANT. HE
SAID HE WOULD USE
THE OTHER PATH
TO RETURN!

TWICE THE NAZI SENTRY'S CHALLENGE RANG OUT, BUT VASCARI SEEMED NOT TO HEAR. THEN THE SENTRY'S GUN FLAMED AND THE ITALIAN CRASHED HEAVILY INTO A GULLY,

ON
YOUR FEET,
YOU LAZY
DOLTS! WAKE
UP!



VASCARI CRINGED
AS THE GERMANS
APPROACHED...

SO—IT
IS OUR BRAVE ALLY!
YOU USED THE
WRONG PATH,
MY FRIEND!

I...I FORGOT...
I WAS HURRYING
BACK...



THE NAZI OFFICER BENT DOWN SWIFTLY AND SNATCHED THE BANK NOTES FROM VASCARI'S POCKET. . .

YOU HAVE MADE A SECOND MISTAKE, ITALIAN— YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE FLAUNTED YOUR ENGLISH BLOOD MONEY. YOU HAVE TRICKED US. YOU SHALL DIE!



VASCARI SCREAMED AS THE COLD MUZZLE OF THE LUGER PRESSED AGAINST HIS TEMPLE.

WE MUST MOVE QUICKLY! THIS TRAITOR MAY HAVE SET A TRAP FOR US! WE CANNOT RISK STAYING!



BRANNIGAN AND THE BOY HAD HEARD THE SHOTS AS THEY CROUCHED IN THE DARK SHADOW OF THE CLIFF.

WE MUST STICK IT OUT HERE, PAOLO. WE CANNOT MOVE FAR IN THIS DARKNESS...



BUT THE GERMANS WERE NOT TO ARRIVE THAT NIGHT. HURRIEDLY, THE FRIGHTENED LEUTNANT, FEARING A PARTISAN ATTACK, LED HIS MEN BACK DOWN THE MOUNTAIN.

BRANNIGAN'S FACE WAS WHITE AND DRAWN WITH FATIGUE AS HE GENTLY SHOOK THE SLEEPING BOY IN THE COLD MORNING LIGHT.

TIME FOR US TO BE MOVING, PAOLO...

THE KID'S BEEN CRYING! HE MUST HAVE WANTED THAT KNIFE AS A PRESENT FOR HIS FATHER PRETTY BADLY!




LATER THAT DAY, THEY PARTED. FROM THE RIDGE WHERE THEY STOOD, BRANNIGAN COULD SEE THE SIGNS OF BATTLE...

GOODBYE, SIGNORE BRANNIGAN!

PAOLO! DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT KNIFE... I'VE GOT A FEELING SOMETHING'LL TURN UP!




BRANNIGAN PUSHED ON INTO THE SHELL-BLASTED VILLAGE. THIS WAS THE MOST DANGEROUS PART OF THE WHOLE JOURNEY. SOMEWHERE HERE THE ADVANCE UNITS OF BOTH ARMIES WERE FIGHTING IT OUT...



NO SENSE
IN GOING FARTHER
I'LL SIT TIGHT AND
WAIT UNTIL SOMEBODY
SHOWS THEIR
HAND!

AT LAST A RUNNING SKIRMISH BEGAN TO CONCENTRATE ON THE BUILDINGS AROUND THE SPOT WHERE HE WAS HIDDEN...



THIS IS
BECOMING A
HOT SPOT! I'M IN
THE MIDDLE OF A NO
MAN'S LAND ALL RIGHT,
BUT WH CH WAY
DO I GO?

HE FLATTENED HIMSELF AGAINST THE ROUGH EARTH, PEERING HARD TO THE SOUTH IN THE HOPE OF SEEING AN ALLIED UNIFORM. BUT A FIERCE ARC OF AUTOMATIC FIRE MADE HIM JERK HIS HEAD DOWN...

THAT SOUNDS LIKE A YANKEE GUN... BUT HOW CAN I GET OVER THERE!



THE ATTACK WAVERED THEN DIED TO AN EERIE SILENCE. HE HEARD LOW GUTTURAL VOICES. THREE MEN CHARGED TOWARDS HIM FROM THE REAR.

THE THREE SURVIVORS OF THE S.S. PATROL DID NOT SEE BRANNIGAN AS THEY MADE THEIR DESPERATE BID TO REACH THE SAFETY OF THE SCRUB LAND BEYOND THE SPOT WHERE HE LAY.



ONE LONG RAKING BURST SLAMMED THE THREE STORM-TROOPERS FROM THEIR FEET.

STILL CLUTCHING HIS PISTOL, ONE OF THE DEAD NAZIS FELL RIGHT ON TOP OF BRANNIGAN...



THE PISTOL CRASHED DOWN ON BRANNIGAN'S HEAD. HE THRESHED VIOLENTLY BUT THE WEIGHT OF THE CRUMPLED BODY PINIONED HIM TO THE GROUND.



THROUGH THE THINNING GUNSMOKE, SERGEANT EDDIE GILMORE OF THE FIFTH AMERICAN ARMY, SLOWLY STUDIED THE FACES OF THE DEAD MEN THROUGH HIS FIELD GLASSES. HE KNEW THE S.S. AND HE WAS TAKING NO CHANCES...

WELL...
COME ON,
SERGEANT, WHAT
GIVES?

MIGHTY
STRANGE, LIEUTENANT!
WE GUNNED THREE NAZIS
DOWN... BUT THERE'S
FOUR BODIES OUT
THERE NOW!



WHEN THE AMERICANS REACHED HIM, BRANNIGAN LAY WHITE-FACED AND STILL.

BRANNIGAN'S ROAD HAD BEEN A HARD ONE BEFORE, BUT THIS FINAL ORDEAL HAD DRAINED HIM. IN HOSPITAL, HE LAY FOR SOME DAYS IN A COMA...

FLIGHT
LIEUTENANT
BRANNIGAN...
ROYAL AIR
FORCE...

HE
LOOKS LIKE
HE'S HAD A FEW
ROUGH LANDINGS
LATELY. WE'D
BETTER GET HIM
BACK IN A
HURRY!



Chapter 4. *Forbidden Flight*

A WEEK LATER, AN EMBARRASSED BRANNIGAN WAS GRIPPING THE HAND OF AN EQUALLY EMBARRASSED DOC WILSON. THEY HAD NEVER BEEN ON FRIENDLY TERMS, AND BOTH FELT ILL AT EASE.

SORRY WE'RE A BIT LATE GETTING TO SEE YOU, BRANNIGAN. THE NEWS DIDN'T GET TO US UNTIL FORTY-EIGHT HOURS AGO!



DOC WILSON WATCHED THE CORNER OF THE MOUTH CURL UP IN THE FAMILIAR SNEER. BEHIND THE DARK GLASSES HE COULD IMAGINE THE EYES, NARROW AND BLEAK.

I HOPE THE NEWS THAT I WAS ALIVE WASN'T TOO DEPRESSING TO MANSTON AND HIS FRIENDS!

MANSTON'S DEAD. HE BOUGHT IT TWO DAYS AFTER YOU WERE REPORTED MISSING. AN INFANTRY PATROL PICKED UP HIS BODY. S.S. THUGS HAD BEATEN HIM UP, THEN SHOT HIM...



BRANNIGAN SAT MOTIONLESS AND SILENT...

Killer Streak

55

STRANGE THINGS WERE HAPPENING TO BRANNIGAN. PIECE BY PIECE, THE ARMOUR OF HIS CYNICISM WAS BEING STRIPPED FROM HIM.

I'M SORRY...
ABOUT MANSTON,
DOC.

I'D LIKE TO THINK YOU WERE,
BRANNIGAN. I HEAR THEY'RE
CHECKING YOUR EYES AGAIN
TOMORROW. I'LL STICK AROUND
WITH YOU TO HEAR THE
VERDICT.



THE SENIOR MEDICAL OFFICER WAS A DOUR,
BLUNT SCOT. ONCE BRANNIGAN MIGHT HAVE
GAINED A MALICIOUS PLEASURE FROM
SPARRING VERBALLY WITH SUCH A CHARACTER.
BUT NOW HE HAD NOTHING TO SAY...

IN LAYMAN'S
TERMS, BRANNIGAN,
YOUR HEAD INJURIES HAVE
HAD EFFECTS ON YOUR
OPTIC NERVES! NOT ONLY
ARE YOUR FLYING DAYS
OVER, BUT YOU STAND
A GRAVE RISK OF
BLINDNESS!



WITHOUT A WORD, BRANNIGAN GOT UP AND LEFT THE ROOM. HE COULD NOT GRASP A SITUATION WHERE A MAN MUST GRIMLY WAIT TO TAKE THE PUNISHMENT THAT COMES TO HIM.

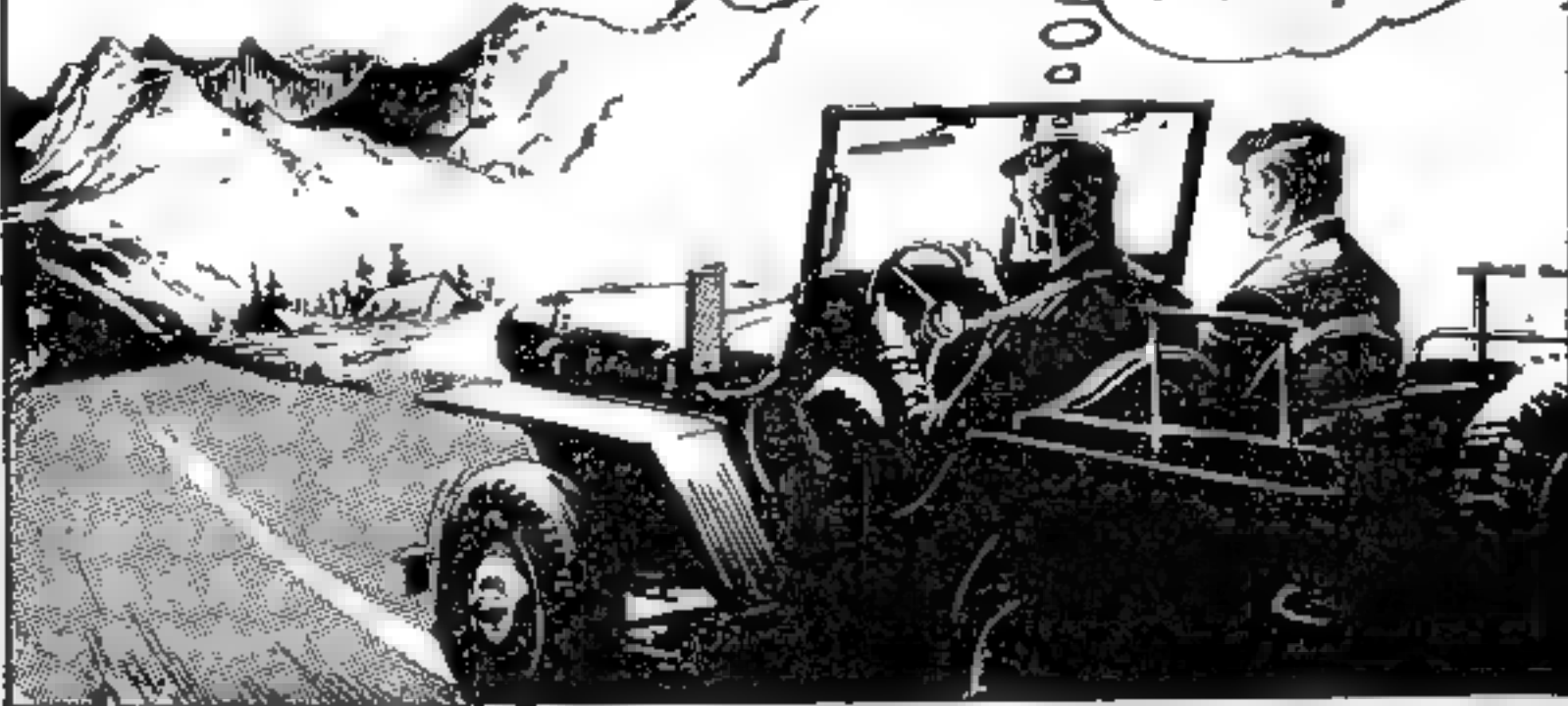
WE HAVE SOME UNPLEASANT DUTIES IN THIS BUSINESS, WILSON! BUT YON LADDIE DOESN'T SEEM THE TYPE TO BREAK UNDER SUCH A BLOW!

NO, *HE*'LL NEVER BREAK...



NEXT DAY DOC WILSON WONDERED IDLY ABOUT THE PARCEL WHICH BRANNIGAN HELD ON HIS KNEES AS THEY DROVE NORTHWARDS. THE PILOT WAS SILENT AGAIN AS THE MILES PASSED BY.

THE FIRST TIME THE SQUADRON TAKES OFF AND BRANNIGAN'S LEFT STANDING ON THE STRIP WILL BE THE REAL TESTING TIME FOR HIM!



THE C.O. TRIED HARD TO MAKE BRANNIGAN FEEL WELCOME, ALTHOUGH HE WAS RELIEVED WHEN HE COULD TRUTHFULLY PLEAD A REASON FOR CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW.

WELL, GENTLEMEN,
I'M AFRAID I'VE GOT THE
AIR VICE-MARSHAL
COMING AT THREE O'CLOCK.
ONCE AGAIN, BRANNIGAN,
CONGRATULATIONS ON
YOUR AMAZING
ESCAPE!

THANK YOU.
I UNDERSTAND I'M
TO BE HERE UNTIL A
FINAL DECISION IS
MADE ABOUT MY
FUTURE, I HAVE
ONE FAVOUR
TO ASK...



LISTENING TO BRANNIGAN'S REQUEST, THE C.O. WISHED HEARTILY THAT SOMEONE HAD SHIPPED THE BIG MAN BACK TO ENGLAND INSTEAD OF TO 802 SQUADRON.

NO,
BRANNIGAN, IT'S
OUT OF THE QUESTION!
MY ORDERS ARE THAT
YOU ARE TO BE TAKEN
OFF ALL FLYING DUTIES.
I CAN'T LET YOU TAKE
A PLANE JUST TO
MAKE A JOYRIDE!



Killer Streak

TO THE ASTONISHMENT OF THE C.O., BRANNIGAN SILENTLY SALUTED AND LEFT THE ROOM.



NOW
I AM WORRIED!
DOC, I NEVER THOUGHT
I'D SEE BRANNIGAN
GIVE IN THAT
EASILY!

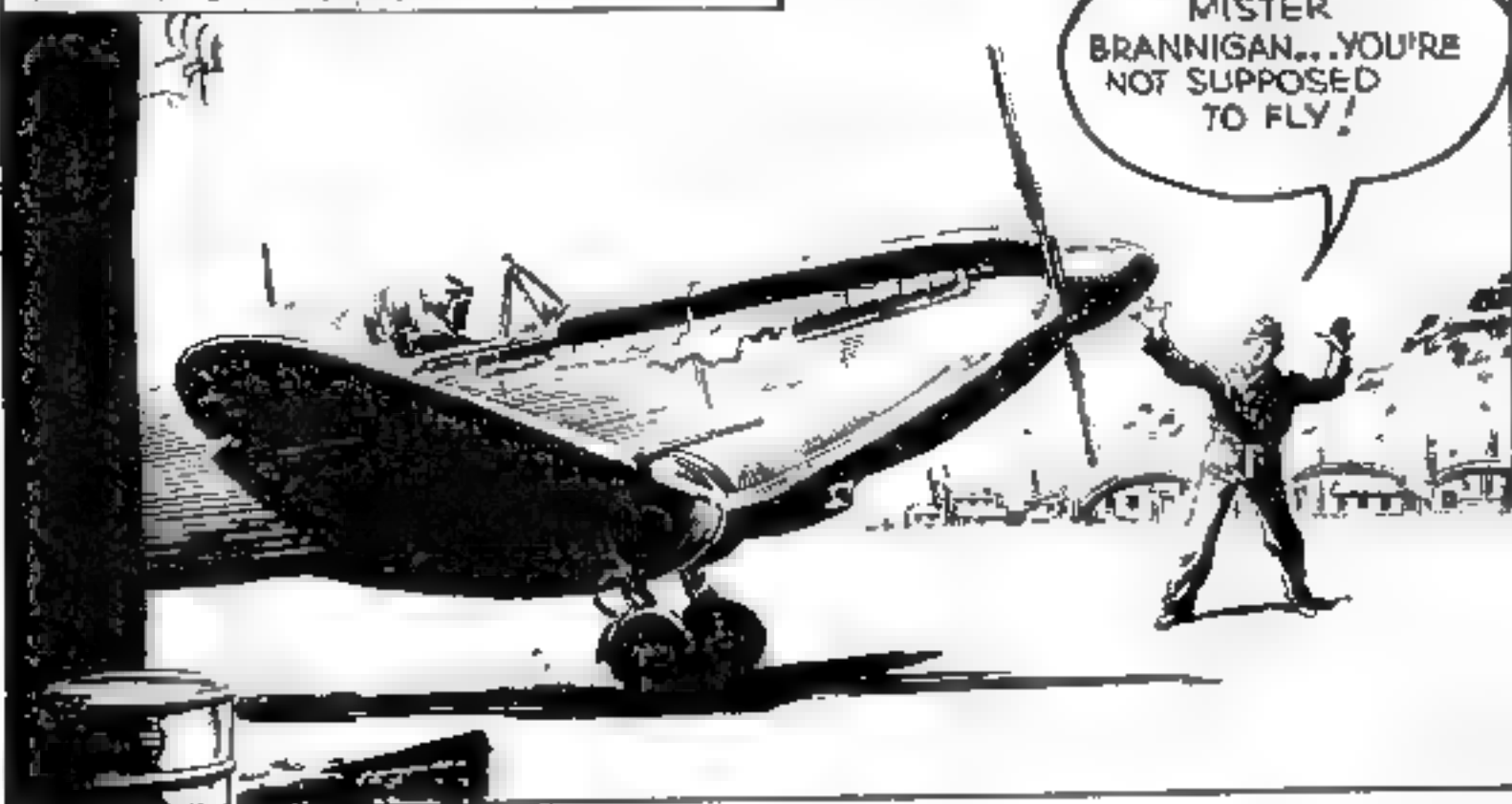


IN THE SECLUSION OF
HIS OWN ROOM,
BRANNIGAN CAREFULLY
FOLDED A LARGE
SILK SCARF. THERE
WAS A DEBT TO BE
PAID TO A BOY
NAMED PAOLO, AND
BRANNIGAN INTENDED
TO REPAY IT,
WHATEVER THE COST!

THREE DAYS
BEFORE THE OLD
MAN'S BIRTHDAY...
I *MUST* GO
TOMORROW...



IT WAS A COLD GREY MORNING AND THE MECHANIC WAS STILL HALF ASLEEP. IT WAS ONLY AS THE SPITFIRE'S WHEELS STARTED TO ROLL THAT HE REALISED WHAT WAS HAPPENING...




HERE!
MISTER
BRANNIGAN...YOU'RE
NOT SUPPOSED
TO FLY!

THE PLANE HAD BEEN STANDING AT THE WRONG END OF THE STRIP AND BRANNIGAN HAD TO TURN BACK OVER THE MAIN HUTS TO GET HER ON RIGHT COURSE...



WHAT THE
HECK...!


IT'S MISTER
BRANNIGAN,
SIR! HE CAUGHT
ME ON THE
HOP, SIR!



WHAT'S THE ANSWER, DOC? HAS HE GONE ROUND THE BEND?

A black and white comic panel showing two men from the chest up, seen from behind, looking out a large window. Outside the window, a small airplane is visible in the sky. The man on the right is speaking, and his words are in a speech bubble.

THERE MAY BE A TRIGGER-HAPPY PILOT IN THAT COCKPIT, BUT I DOUBT IT. THE BRANNIGANS OF THIS WORLD DON'T GO CRAZY. MY GUESS IS HE'LL BE BACK, ALTHOUGH YOU MAY NEVER KNOW THE REASON HE MADE THE TRIP...



BRANNIGAN FLEW THE SPITFIRE LOW AND HARD INTO THE HAZE. SOME OF IT WAS EARLY MORNING MIST, AND SOME OF IT WAS THE CLOUDINESS THAT WOULD NEVER CLEAR FROM HIS EYES AGAIN...

A black and white comic panel showing a Spitfire flying low over a battlefield. Several soldiers are visible on the ground, some looking up at the plane. The scene is hazy and misty. A speech bubble from the man on the right in the panel above is visible on the right side of this panel.

A MACHINE-GUN WOULD BRING HIM DOWN. HE MUST BE ASLEEP, THE WAY HE FLIES!

HE SAW THE FLASH OF THE RICOCHETING RIFLE BULLET AS IT HIT THE COCKPIT FLANGE. WITH THE SMOOTH ACTION OF THE VETERAN, HE ROLLED THE PLANE ON ONE WING-TIP...



IT WAS THE OLD BRANNIGAN WHO CLIMBED, TURNING BACK ON H.S. COURSE, THEN DIVED, LINING UP THE NAZI PATROL IN HIS GUNSIGHTS...



THE EXHAUST HEAT FLAMED ACROSS THEM. THEN THE SPITFIRE WAS GONE, CLIMBING HARD AND FAST, WITH HER GUN-BUTTON UNTOUCHED! BRANNIGAN HIMSELF DID NOT KNOW WHAT HAD STOPPED HIM FIRING HIS GUNS...

THE ENGLISHMAN MUST BE CRAZY! HE COULD HAVE KILLED US ALL!



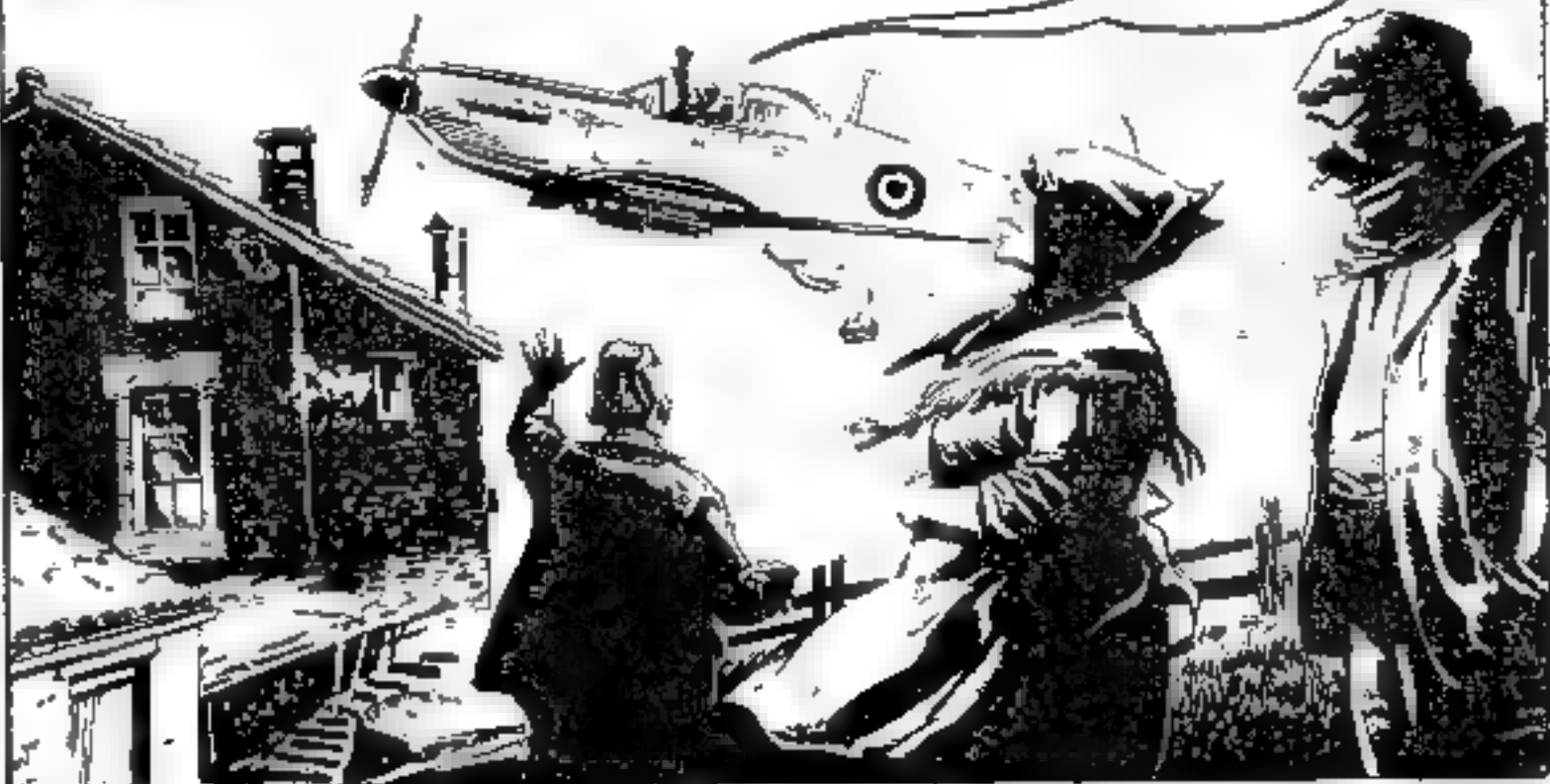
THERE WAS NO ONE IN SIGHT AS HE SIDESLIPPED INTO THE PRECIPITOUS VALLEY WHERE LEONARDO'S FARM STOOD. HE ROARED LOW OVER THE BUILDINGS AND SMILED AS A BOYISH FIGURE RAN OUT...

IT IS SIGNORE BRANNIGAN! I KNEW HE WOULD COME!



THE SPITFIRE WAS DANGEROUSLY NEAR TO STALLING SPEED AS BRANNIGAN CAME BACK FOR THE SECOND RUN. HE HEAVED THE SILK BUNDLE CLEAR OF THE SLIP-STREAM.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, FOLKS!



BRANNIGAN CIRCLED TO WATCH THEM RETRIEVING THE PARACHUTE. THEN AS SUDDENLY AS HE CAME, HE WAS GONE.

HE DID NOT FORGET, FATHER! THERE IS NOT SO MUCH STEEL IN HIS HEAD AS YOU THOUGHT!



BACK OVER 802 SQUADRON'S BASE, BRANNIGAN THROTTLED BACK AND, IN THAT SPLIT SECOND, KNEW THAT HE WAS GOING TO CRASH. HIS UNDERCARRIAGE RAMMED HARD INTO THE RUNWAY, AND SMASHED TO PIECES.

MY EYES...
EVERYTHING'S
GONE BLACK!

THEY MANAGED TO GET BRANNIGAN OUT OF THE COCKPIT BEFORE THE WRECKED SPITFIRE BURST INTO FLAME...

THE IDIOT!
FLOUTING MY
ORDERS...!

TAKE IT
EASY, SIR...
NOT NOW...

THE ANSER DIED FROM THE C.O.'S FEATURES AS THEY SLOWLY WALKED OVER TO THE WRECKED AIRCRAFT. A PUZZLED MECHANIC FACED HIM...

IT'S A COMPLETE WRITE-OFF, SIR. FUNNY THING, THOUGH, WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT MISTER BRANNIGAN WOULD HAVE TURNED HIS BACK ON A SCRAP, EH?

WHAT?

SEE FOR YOURSELF, SIR! THE PLANE'S PEPPERED WITH RIFLE FIRE... BUT THERE'S NOT A SHOT BEEN FIRED FROM THESE GUNS!



DOC WILSON WAS A WISER MAN THAN THE C.O. HE HAD SEEN MEN DIE, AND HE HAD SEEN MEN CONQUER DEATH BY SHEER GUTS. NOW HE WAS SEEING A MAN WHO HAD CONQUERED HIMSELF. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, A TOUCH OF HUMANITY HAD TEMPERED THE STEEL-HARD MIND OF 'BUTCHER' BRANNIGAN.

BY HARRY, BRANNIGAN'S GONE TOO FAR THIS TIME!

YOU'RE WRONG, SIR! HE'S STILL GOT A LONG WAY TO GO... BUT HE'LL MAKE IT! THE BRANNIGAN WE ALL KNEW IS DEAD AND GONE! YOU CAN WRITE HIM OFF WITH THAT SPITFIRE...

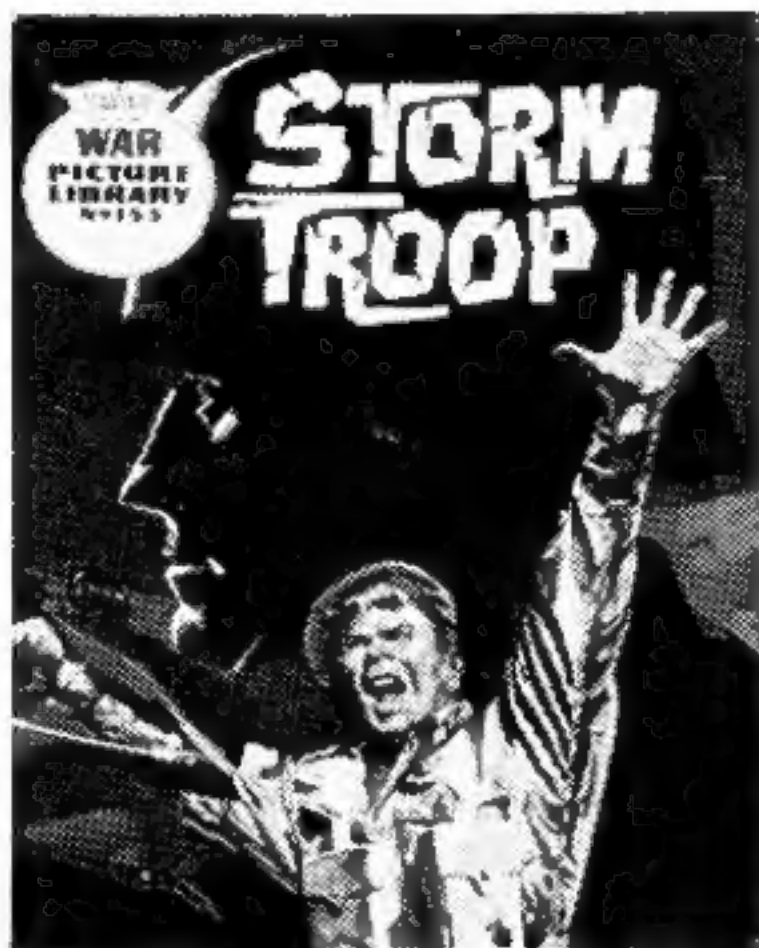


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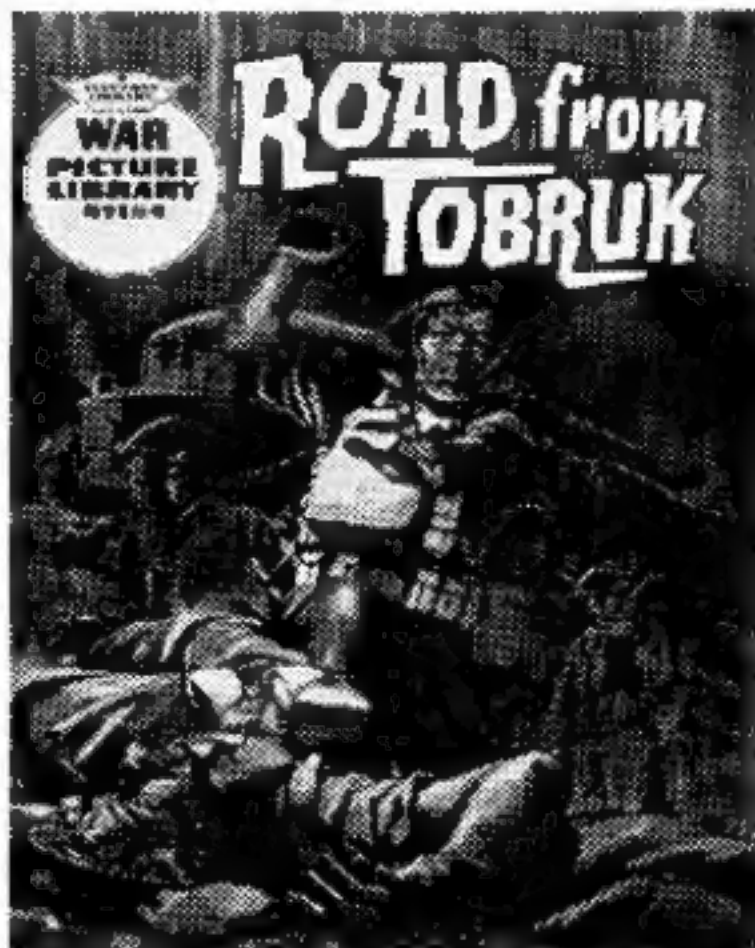
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